



Objection 400

John Dickie

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Redistribution Secretariat for Victoria
Australian Electoral Commission
GPO Box 768
MELBOURNE VIC 3001

Dear Sir / Madam

**PROPOSED REDISTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL ELECTORATE OF MELBOURNE
AND THE IMPACTS ON FLEMINGTON**

My submission is in response to the proposed changes to the Division of Melbourne and in particular the proposal to move Flemington (and Travancore) into the Division of Maribyrnong. I object to the proposal on the following grounds:

1. The proposed boundary changes do not reflect the community of interests.
2. The proposal would adversely impact on parliamentary representation for Flemington voters.
3. There are other readily available and more appropriate options for redistributions that could have proper regard to the factors in section 66 of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* without such adverse impacts.

By way of background, I have lived in Flemington and Kensington for over 20 years. I am involved in the local community in a number of capacities.

I am a member of the Flemington Association, our local residents group. I am Chair of the Association's heritage committee. I run our heritage website and a popular Facebook page that cover the history of Flemington and Kensington. I am a regular contributor to the *Flemington Kensington News*, our local newspaper. I was for some years involved in the Flemington Kensington mentoring group. My daughter attends the local high school, servicing Flemington and Kensington, and attended the local primary school, the bulk of whose students live in Flemington and Kensington.

Many of my friends live in Flemington, Kensington, Travancore and North Melbourne. This is where I walk, cycle, socialise, eat, shop, exercise and play. It is my community of interest.

1. Community of Interest

My life and the lives of most of the people I know in my community are centred firmly in Flemington (including Travancore), Newmarket (the shared area between Flemington and Kensington), Kensington, North Melbourne and the city.

I lived in Ascot Vale for several months. It is very different in composition, population, houses, needs and approaches to life than Flemington. People gravitate to the north for shopping and other activities.

Demographic figures compiled by the ABS support my personal experience that Flemington (and Travancore) is distinguishable from other suburbs in Moonee Valley City Council. This include our younger, more ethnically-diverse population, fewer couples, more people speaking a language other than English, religions, high rental and public housing accommodation, higher population density and greater needs and interest in public transport, walking and cycling than driving.

The history of Flemington and Kensington is intertwined. We have been one community since European settlement. This means, for example, that (applying the boundary of Racecourse Road):

- a) Flemington Library is in Kensington. Until Moonee Valley City Council took over, it was called the Flemington and Kensington Library from the 1880's.
- b) The former Kensington Fire Station is in Flemington.
- c) The Kensington Masonic Lodge was in Flemington.
- d) The Flemington Dispensary was in Kensington.
- e) The Flemington Court and Post Office serviced the Flemington and Kensington community. We share the same postcode.
- f) The former Flemington and Kensington Town Hall is in Kensington.
- g) Our shared war memorial is in Kensington.
- h) Newmarket Reserve is in Kensington.

These connections continue today in many forms, including the following:

- a) We have one RSL Club (the Flemington & Kensington RSL).
- b) We have one Bowling Club (the Flemington & Kensington Bowls Club).
- c) We have one community newspaper (the Flemington Kensington News).
- d) We have one shared junior sporting organisation (Kensington Flemington Junior Sports Club).
- e) Mount Alexander College is the main high school for Flemington and Kensington.
- f) Online social groups are generally combined under "Flem Ken".
- g) Other groups and organisations cover both Flemington and Kensington.
- h) Racecourse Road is our main shared activity centre.

We have for most of our history focused on Melbourne.

In 1861 our community briefly established a borough with Essendon, but it was not long after that union that disharmony was evident, with a growing recognition – particularly as population grew - that the two areas were fundamentally different.

Flemington and Kensington set up our own separate borough in 1882. In 1905, we successfully sought, with North Melbourne, to join the City of Melbourne. Residents of North Melbourne and Flemington and Kensington had aspirations to be part of a shared community. Little has changed over the past 100 or more years. If anything, the similarities between our connecting inner city suburbs and the sense of community here have increased.

2. Adverse impacts from being in an electorate that is not a community of interest

The rationales for having electorates is dependent on the person elected being able to properly represent all within the electorate, and not a different community of interest.

If a clearly-identifiable community is placed within an electorate with a distinct and different community of interest, it means the marginalised community's voice is reduced substantially or there is effectively little or no representation.

This was highlighted by the boundary changes of 1995 when, without consultation or due process, Flemington and part of Kensington was shifted into Moonee Valley City Council by the Victorian State Government. This raised difficulties that are ongoing. Many in our local community continue to lobby for proper representation and for the community to be represented within the one municipality and electorates.

The adverse impacts can be emphasised by the following points:

- a) Of the 9 councillors on Moonee Valley City Council, there are none from Flemington (including Travancore). This is despite our local residents having historically been very active politically. Since 1995, I am aware of only one Flemington resident being elected to Moonee Valley City Council.
- b) Kensington, meanwhile, with a very similar population, continues to enjoy several councillors representing them on the City of Melbourne.
- c) It is unlikely that a potential candidate from Flemington, however good and actively involved in the community and supported by the local community, could get elected to Moonee Valley City Council (or the Essendon electorate). This is because they are not likely to be involved in the Essendon community of interest, to be able to properly act for a different community of interest and are not likely to be able to garner votes from a different community.

- d) Melbourne Division has had two long-serving Flemington residents in Parliament. This includes the current member, who – living in the community of interest and actively involved in the community of interest – has been elected on a number of occasions. If we are moved to the Division of Maribyrnong, there is no possibility of an active local being elected to represent us in federal parliament.
- e) The local Flem Ken community has historically arranged “Meet the Candidates” events for state elections. This is not likely to happen in the future, because of the recognition that Flemington residents are not likely to have any impact on election outcomes in an electorate comprised of a different community of interest. This would also apply if we were to be shifted into the Maribyrnong Division.
- f) Those of us actively involved in local politics appreciate and understand that councillors at Moonee Valley City Council and the State MP for Essendon are focused on their community of interest. But this is of little comfort to us when it is often at the expense of our community.

These are but illustrations.

If the Redistribution Committee was to simply redraw boundaries on the basis of state or municipal boundaries, this would be on the false and unjustified premise that these boundaries represent community of interests.

Changing the federal boundary and shifting us into the Maribyrnong electorate would only compound the issues of division and lack of representation that locals currently face, being isolated in an electorate (and council) comprising a different community.

3. Other readily-available options for redistribution

There are other options for redistribution that are readily available that would result in the same or similar numbers of electors in electorates, without the adverse impacts on Flemington and Kensington.

For example, it is concerning that the current proposals shift areas into Melbourne, including parts of Clifton Hill and Fitzroy North, despite these areas having been removed after changes in 2010 and these areas having less connection than Flemington with the Melbourne Division, historically, physically, and otherwise.

These areas could be retained in the divisions into which they were moved (Batman and Wills), maintaining continuity for the electors in those Divisions. Voters from Wills in the Oak Park area could be shifted easily into Maribyrnong, representing a similar number of people than those in Flemington. The Craigieburn train line would meet the requirement for an appropriate physical feature and the residents are more likely to share a community of interest.

I urge the Redistribution Committee to consider these options, and the issues outlined, to reconsider the proposed boundaries and to aim to ensure that those of us living in Flemington will into the future share a district and a local member of federal parliament with our community of interest.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Yours sincerely

John Dickie